

Grasscycling

means leaving the grass clippings on the lawn after mowing, so they decompose and release their nutrients into the soil.

Many successful landscapers and turf professionals have

made grasscycling a central part of their businesses.

Grasscycling can be important

to your business, too.



"AS long as the lawn looks good, our customers are happy. The main reason we grasscycle is cost savings. We don't have to bag the clippings and take them to the dump."

— Andy LaVelle, Branch Manager TruGreen LandCare, Pleasanton

Save Time and Money

Grasscycling is a faster, cheaper and easier way to maintain a healthy lawn. Grasscycling:

- Reduces mowing time by as much as 20 minutes per hour
- Decreases hauling time
- Cuts disposal fees
- Lowers fertilizer costs

Grasscycling may also reduce injuries, absences, and related costs. A 2,000-square-foot lawn in California generates about 15 pounds of clippings per mowing. Over the course of a day, grasscycling eliminates a lot of lifting for you or your crew.

Grasscycling Builds Healthy Turf and Soil

Grasscycling returns nitrogen and other nutrients to the soil, releasing them slowly. The slow release makes the nutrients available to the plants when the plants need them. On most turf, you can use substantially less fertilizer. In addition, because clippings add organic matter, they build soil that retains more nutrients and water, plus resists erosion and disease.



"We've been grasscycling for 15 years because we get a healthier lawn with fewer weeds."

Richard Applebaum, President/General Mgr.
 East Bay Landscaping Co., Inc., San Leandro

Grasscycling is Good for the Environment

By grasscycling, you help:

- Conserve landfill space
- Reduce fertilizer runoff
- Preserve natural resources

Grasscycling Won't Cause Thatch

It's a widespread myth that grasscycling causes thatch. Research has shown that thatch is primarily dead grass roots and fibrous material created at the base of the plant, not leaf clippings. Excess fertilizer and irrigating only the top few inches of soil leads to shallow roots and increases thatch problems. Soil compaction also increases thatch.

The factor that most determines thatch is the species of grass. Certain species — Kentucky bluegrass, kikuyu, Bermuda and the bentgrasses used on golf greens and tees — are prone to thatch because they send out creeping stems above ground. Starting with the right species of grass, such as tall fescue for Alameda County, is the best way to prevent thatch.

A small half-inch layer of thatch is actually beneficial to the lawn as it insulates the roots, minimizes water evaporation and helps prevent soil compaction. However, if the lawn has a thick layer of thatch, clippings won't decompose as efficiently. It's best to deal with any thatch problems before you start to grasscycle.





"On athletic fields, grasscycling improves overall turf density and health leading to a safer playing surface.

— Bob Milano, Jr., Sports Turf Manager Dept. of Intercollegiate Athletics and Recreational Sports University of California, Berkeley





"If we were to stop grasscycling, and instead pick up our grass clippings and haul them away, it would double our turf maintenance costs."

— Ray Dawson, Park Unit Manager East Bay Regional Park District and Three-time past President, Northern California Turf Grass Council



"Aren't you tired of lifting burlap tarps?"

— Bob Milano, Jr., Sports Turf Manager Dept. of Intercollegiate Athletics and Recreational Sports University of California, Berkeley



"For general purpose turf in Alameda County, in clay or sandy soils, on either side of the hills, the best turfgrass species is tall fescue."

— Dr. Ali Harivandi, Environmental Horticulturalist University of California Cooperative Extension, Alameda



Tips from the Pros...

Many picturesque local parks and golf courses — including the East Bay Regional Parks and Hayward Area Parks have grasscycled for years.





"If there are a lot of clippings on the lawn, we mow twice, then turn on the water for two minutes. That knocks the clippings down between the blades."

- Bill Gardner, Supervisor Hayward Area Recreation and Park Department



"When we get rapid growth, we raise our mower height to three inches."

- Richard Applebaum, President/General Manager East Bay Landscaping Co., Inc., San Leandro



"In spring, when grass is wet and growing fast, the challenge with grasscycling is sheer volume. We solve the problem by mowing two, three, or even four times."

- Ray Dawson, Park Unit Manager, East Bay Regional Park District



"If you fail, don't get frustrated. It takes a while to get used to the process."

- Richard Applebaum, President/General Manager East Bay Landscaping Co., Inc., San Leandro

Three Simple Steps to Grasscycling



Mow often and mow dry.

Make your crews aware of the optimal conditions for grasscycling. Grasscyling works best when the grass is dry and the clippings are short. Mowing no more than 1/3 the leaf blade minimizes the stress on the lawn and produces shorter clippings. However, most professionals find it difficult to follow the 1/3 guideline since they mow according to a schedule, not grass height. Try to schedule mowing on days the lawn is not watered or later in the day when the grass tends to be dry.

Maintain and adjust your equipment.

Sharpen your blades often — at least once a week — and keep them clean and balanced. A clean cut limits water stress, lowers the chance of disease entry and minimizes brown tips. And a clean mower deck helps keep clippings from forming clumps.



3 Leave the clippings on the lawn!



Here's how professionals get beautiful, healthy turf— even in less than ideal conditions:

Grass Too Tall?

• Mow more than once. When the costs of time, landfill fees, soil and turf health are considered, mowing two or more times can still be less expensive than bagging and disposal.

- Raise the blade height to 3 inches and gradually lower it over future mowings.
- Be flexible with your fertilization schedule. Keeping grass green while minimizing growth may mean little or no spring fertilizers and the use of slow release fertilizers in the fall.

Grass Too Wet?

- Schedule irrigation for the days you are not mowing.
- If you have a choice, mow later in the day, after the grass has had a chance to dry.

Clippings Forming Windrows?

Mow again with a crosscut to chop and disperse clippings.

Clippings Clumping Up?

- Clean under the mower deck. Keep blades sharp and balanced.
- Try operating the mower at a slower speed.

Leaves on the Lawn?

- Often you can shred leaves with your mower and leave them on the lawn. This technique works well with a light layer of dry, brittle leaves which will be finely chopped and forced between the grass blades to the soil surface.
- A thin layer of chopped leaves no thicker than 1/2 the height of the grass blade — is not noticeable and adds nutrients when the recycled leaves decompose.

And When You Just Can't Grasscycle . . .

Sometimes, the grass is too wet or too long. Other times, customers insist on clippings being picked up. In these cases, you can:

- Compost the clippings on site. Grass clippings are a natural source of nitrogen and readily decompose, especially when you mix with dry, carbon-rich materials such as dried leaves.
- Use the customer's green waste container, if available.
- Separate clippings for recycling at a transfer station or landfill and receive a discount for clean green loads.
- Use landfill as a last resort.

Choosing Your Equipment

Turf professionals have varying opinions on which equipment works best. Some get good results with mulching mowers. Others say standard mowers work better, and some use standard mowers with mulching retrofit kits.

To find the best mowers for grasscycling the lawns you maintain, get information from professional contacts.

Be sure to test out several types of equipment before buying.



Keep in mind:

- A mulching mower needs about 20% more power than bagging mowers operated at the same speed.
- Mulching mowers perform better at slower speeds.
- Examine clipping discharge, especially for multiple blade mowers. Baffles between the blades under the mower deck help ensure clippings are evenly distributed.
- Mulching mowers may be heavier than standard mowers. Wide tires can help keep mower from sinking or causing ruts in the lawn.

Keep in mind also, gas mowers emit 10 times the pollution of late-model cars, per hour of use. This pollution is in the operator's breathing zone. To cut down pollution:

- Upgrade your two-stroke to a four-stroke cycle engine, which has lower emissions and better fuel efficiency.
- Keep gas mowers well-tuned and in good repair, so they run cleaner.
- Consider electric mowers. Riding electric mowers are now used at putting greens on golf courses.

Convincing Your Customer...

"I try to catch my customers when they're at the site, then mow right in front of them. They can see right there that there's no difference if I leave the clippings. Then, it's OK with them."

— James Long, Owner/President American Lawn Maintenance, Fremont

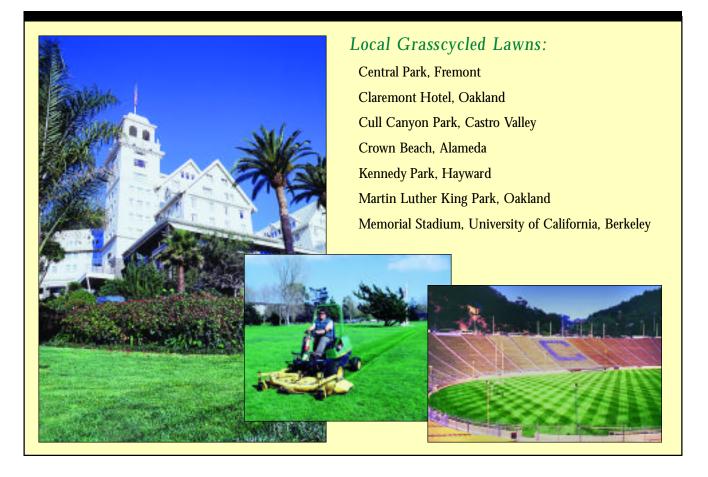


"We give our customers some literature about grasscycling And we make a strong commitment to making the lawn look good, so the customers are usually willing to try it. Once they see the results, they say, 'Keep doing it.'"

— Richard Applebaum, President/General Manager East Bay Landscaping Co., Inc., San Leandro Providing an environmentally friendly service such as grass-cycling can be attractive to customers in the Bay Area. One survey showed that 20% of homeowners would be interested in an environmentally sound landscaping service. To convince customers, it can be helpful to:

- Ask about grasscycling during the pre-bid walk-through.
- Emphasize that the grasscycled lawn will look beautiful.
- Describe the environmental benefits, plus the benefits to the lawn and soil.
- Request a trial period.

To help you persuade your customers, the Alameda County Waste Management Authority provides free grasscycling brochures for your clients. Model contract language is also available.





More Natural Lawn Care Techniques

A dense, healthy lawn out competes most weeds.

Grasscycling is one part of a sound program for creating lush turf without chemicals. Here are more ways to build fertile soil and vigorous, deep-rooted grass that resists disease and drought damage.

- Mow high. The longer the blade, the deeper the root. Most lawns will develop deeper roots and crowd out weeds when mowed at a height of 2.5 3 inches.
- Water deeply. Water enough to wet the soil to a depth of 4" to 6". This will encourage deeper root growth. Use a soil probe to check how deeply you've watered.
- Improve established lawns with aeration and overseeding.
 Overseed to fill in thin spots and crowd out weeds.
- Topdress with compost. An excellent practice is to aerate, then spread a mixture of fine finished compost into the holes made by the aerator. Apply 1/4" layer of sifted compost up to four times per year.
- Fertilize lightly in the fall with an organic fertilizer or slow-release synthetic fertilizer. Natural or slow-release fertilizers, such as sulphur- or polymer-coated urea, release nutrients slowly. This lets the grass absorb nutrients efficiently.
- Reduce the use of pesticides, soluble fertilizers and combinations of "weed and feed" that can damage soil
 health. Overuse of pesticides and heavy fertilizers robs
 soil of beneficial bacteria, fungi, insects, and worms. Target problem weeds with hand weeding or spot-spraying.
- Consider planting something besides grass on steep slopes, shady areas, or near streams and lakes. Grass grows best in sunny areas with well-drained soil.



"I used to use a lot more fertilizer. Now I judge by eye if the lawn needs it. I've cut back by at least one-half."

— James Long, Owner/President American Lawn Maintenance, Fremont



"We aerate every 2 years to keep grass healthy, and overseed fescue 100%."

Ray Dawson, Park Unit Manager
 East Bay Regional Park District







777 Davis Street, Suite 100, San Leandro, CA 94577 email: acwma@stopwaste.org

Each year in Alameda County, professional landscapers send 140,000 tons of yard waste to landfills. California law enacted by AB 939 requires every city and county to reduce landfill disposal by 50% between 1990 and December, 2000. Alameda County has an even more aggressive goal to reduce disposal by 75% by the year 2010. Grasscycling makes a significant contribution to reducing landfill waste.

The Alameda County Waste Management Authority & Recycling Board offers free technical assistance on grasscycling to lawn care professionals.

Ask about our FREE Resources

- Grasscyling Presentations and Speaker Panel
- Spanish Brochure: "Una Guia para Reciclar Pasto para los Jardineros" (A Landscaper's Guide to Grasscycling)
- Grasscycling information to give to your clients
- Grasscycling bumper stickers

Call our composting hotline: (510)444-SOIL or visit our website: www.stopwaste.org

Grasscycling is Endorsed by:

- Northern California Turf & Landscape Council
- California Landscape Contractors Association
- Professional Lawn Care Association of America

Other Resources

- Website: www.ciwmb.ca.gov/Organics California Integrated Waste Management Board's website lists waste reduction information and resources for the commercial landscaper.
- Brochure: "Resource Recovery Handbook."
 California Landscape Contractors Association. Contact: Larry Rohlfes, Manager of Gov't. Affairs, Phone: (916) 448-2522, email: larryrohlfes@clca.org
- Brochure: "Less Toxic Pest Management Tips For A Healthy, Beautiful Lawn."
 Contact: The Alameda Countywide Clean Water Program. Phone: (510) 670-5543.
- Free Commercial Landscape Irrigation Audits, Irrigation Upgrade Programs, EBMUD Water Conservation Division, Contact: David Landgridge, Phone: (510) 986-7615, email: dlandgrid@ebmud.com



A Landscaper's Guide to Grasscycling

Special thanks to the members of the Grasscycling Advisory Panel who freely shared their experience and expertise: Richard Applebaum, Ray Dawson, Tom Del Conte, Bill Gardner, Andy La Velle, James Long, Bob Milano, Jr. And special thanks to Dr. Ali Harivandi, Environmental Horticulturist, University of California Cooperative Extension and Judy Thomas, Curriculum Chair, Landscape Horticulture Department, Merritt College, Oakland.

Printed on 100% post consumer waste paper with soy-based inks.